

00811

1961/05/10

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

8
12 May 1961

MEMO FOR McGeorge Bundy - personal

Mr Gilpatric this morning
asked me to send you a
copy of the attached. They
are personal views.

Ed Lansdale

TOP SECRET

Defense

10 May 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR DEPUTY SECRETARY GILPATRICK

From: Brig Gen Lansdale

Subject: US Forces in Southeast Asia

Perhaps the following personal views will be of help to you in considering the merits of placing US military forces in Thailand and Vietnam:

First, there is our own US national security interest to consider. These two Southeast Asian countries have certain key points of importance in terms of our own security.

a. Location. Thailand and Vietnam are so located geographically that the loss of either would so weaken the defense posture of neighboring nations that the defense line of the Western Pacific and Indian Oceans would be placed in great jeopardy. The Communists undoubtedly remember the practical geography lesson of Japanese conquest in late 1941. Thailand was the land bridge for ground forces into Malaya and Burma, Vietnam was the air and sea, (aircraft based at Soc Trang sank the Prince of Wales and Repulse, as well as bombed Singapore, while Vietnam-based sea power dominated the South China Sea along Malaya's coast to Indonesia).

b. Manpower. Total population resources are not impressive compared to China's, (nor is any other nation's). However, there are significant Asian resources of trained military manpower in Thailand (131,545) and Vietnam (currently about 158,000) in their regular military forces. The US has invested heavily in training and equipping these Asian forces, giving them a potential of being part of a combat team with US forces. The loss of more than a quarter-million trained Asians who believe in our military is important.

DECLASSIFIED

E.O. 11652, SEC. 3(E), 5(D), 5(E) AND 11

U.S. Archivist NLK-77-281
BY *mgm* DATE 10-18-78

FROM AUTOMATIC
RECEIVED MAY 10 1961
DEPT. OF DEFENSE

This document contains 3 pages.
Copy No. 6 of _____ copies. Series _____

SECRET

c. Other resources. Both Thailand and Vietnam are food surplus areas, particularly in rice. Exploitation would ease logistic burden on Chinese Communist forces, now hurting from agricultural disasters in China. Mineral resources are still not fully known.

d. Psychological. Unlike Laos, the world and other Asians in particular, know that the Thai and Vietnamese military have been closely associated with the US military. In Laos, French-trained forces were defeated by the Communists. In Thailand and Vietnam, the forces are known as US-trained. If Thailand and Vietnam are lost, every other nation in the world will question the effectiveness of US military doctrine, organization, equipment, and training against Communist methods. Let alone the demoralizing effect of lost US prestige as a world power worth heeding by our allies and neutrals, Communist victories in Thailand and Vietnam would be open invitations to further Communist adventures.

Then, there is the question of power itself. US combat forces, even in relatively small units, are the symbol of our national power. If an enemy engages one of our combat units, he is fully aware that he automatically has engaged the entire power of the US. This symbol of real national strength, employed wisely in Germany, Greece, and the Formosa Straits in a manner not unlike that contemplated for Thailand and Vietnam, has "kept the peace." When the mission of such US force is properly announced and followed immediately by a firm action, recent history teaches that the effect is just the reverse of "escalation" and that our action obtains world support outside of the Bloc.

As for composition and deployment of US forces in Thailand and Vietnam, there are several thoughts which suggest themselves:

a. There should be a "hard core" of combat forces, capable of taking care of themselves in foreseeable combat until reinforced as required in a contingency.

b. Built upon this combat "hard core" should be military elements whose mission is to make the US military presence a welcome one with the local population. Engineer units could undertake

SECRET

~~TOP SECRET~~

needed public works, starting initially with roads and landing strips which would also be useful for US military needs in the area. Other units could help in public health (including pure water supply), education, community self-help projects, and give local authorities a big assist in communications and transportation.

c. Good leadership and troop education would increase the beneficial effects of the US military presence. Good leadership resulted in AFAK (Armed Forces Aid to Korea), which was a notable model of how free citizens in uniform behave towards a foreign nation in today's world. Troop education should borrow heavily on a program such as the "area indoctrination" of our Military Assistance Institute, making US troops thoroughly familiar with local customs prior to deployment.

d. The precise military locations of such forces should be dictated first by military need and secondly by psychological need. The first is a purely military decision and should be so respected. On the psychological decision, there is a simple rule of thumb: our forces are in the area to help protect the freedom of an ally, not just to protect US property. Thus, if we station troops at modern landing fields in Thailand, (which Asians think of as built with US funds for US Air Force use in case of war), thought should be given to further dispersal of US forces so that it doesn't appear that our major interest is in protecting potential US bases alone. Further, there is definite military benefit to gain from learning local terrain at first-hand by taking the opportunity to become familiar with as much of it as possible.

There are extra copies of this memo for General Lemnitzer and Mr. Nitze, if you desire them to see this.

cc: Secretary McNamara

~~TOP SECRET~~